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ROBERTS/BEIRUT

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LEBANON PRESIDENTIAL CONTENDERS

AHNCR:

THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT IS SCHEDULED TO MEET THIS WEEKEND TO ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT. AND WHILE THERE ARE FEARS THAT THE MEETING MAY HAVE TO BE POSTPONED FOR THE SECOND TIME, THE TWO MAIN CONTENDERS FOR THE PRESIDENCY ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN THE SAME. VOA'S DOUGLAS ROBERTS IN BEIRUT HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENCES AND YET MANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN RAYMOND EDDE AND ELIAS SARKIS -- THE TWO MAIN RIVALS FOR THE LEBANESE PRESIDENCY. BOTH ARE MARONITE CHRISTIANS IN KEEPING WITH THE LEBANESE TRADITION OF ELECTING A CHIEF OF STATE FROM THE LARGEST OF THIS NATION'S CHRISTIAN SECT. BOTH MISTER EDDE AND MISTER SARKIS HAVE MADE UNSUCCESSFUL BIDS FOR THE PRESIDENCY IN THE PAST AND BOTH MEN HAVE REMAINED NEUTRAL THROUGHOUT THE BLOODY CIVIL WAR THAT HAS RAVAGED LEBANON FOR MORE THAN A YEAR.

SIXTY-THREE YEAR OLD RAYMOND EDDE IS, ABOVE ALL, A POLITICIAN, WHILE FIFTY-YEAR OLD ELIAS SARKIS IS A CAREER ADMINISTRATOR, WHO, FOR THE MOST PART, HAS STAYED OUT OF POLITICS. HE MADE FEW PUBLIC STATEMENTS, AND ALMOST NEVER GRANTS INTERVIEWS.

MISTER EDDE, THE SON OF A LEBANESE PRESIDENT WHO SERVED DURING THE FRENCH MANDATE HERE, ENTERED THE POLITICAL ARENA IN NINETEEN FORTY-NINE, TAKING OVER FROM HIS FATHER AS HEAD OF THE NATIONAL BLOC PARTY. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF

A ONE-YEAR BREAK, HE HAS SERVED IN PARLIAMENT CONTINUOUSLY SINCE NINETEEN FIFTY-THREE SPONSORING A NUMBER OF DOMESTIC REFORM MEASURES. HE HELD A VARIETY OF MINISTERIAL POSTS UNDER FORMER PRESIDENT FUAD CHIHAB, THE ARMY GENERAL WHO WAS ELECTED FOLLOWING THE FIRST LEBANESE CRISIS IN NINETEEN FIFTY-EIGHT. BUT LATER, MISTER EDDE RESIGNED FROM THE CABINET PROTESTING AGAINST WHAT HE SAW AS ARMY INTERFERENCE IN A LEGISLATIVE ELECTION. SINCE THEN, HE HAS REMAINED FIRMLY IN THE OPPOSITION CAMP. AND HE WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO CALL FOR THE RESIGNATION OF THE CURRENT PRESIDENT SULEIMAN FRANJIYEH, WHOM MISTER EDDE BLAMED FOR THE BLOODSHED HERE.

WHILE MAINTAINING CLOSE RELATIONS WITH LEADERS OF THE LARGE PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY IN LEBANON, MISTER EDDE CAME OUT AGAINST THE CAIRO ACCORD OF NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT WHICH GOVERNS RELATIONS BETWEEN THE BEIRUT GOVERNMENT AND THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION. MISTER EDDE REPEATEDLY CALLED FOR A UNITED NATION BUFFER ZONE ON LEBANON'S SOUTHERN BORDER WITH ISRAEL TO HALT PALESTINIAN COMMANDO RAIDS INTO ISRAEL, AND SUBSEQUENT ISRAELI REPRISAL ATTACKS ON LEBANON. MISTER EDDE HAS ALSO BEEN INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF THE CURRENT SYRIAN ROLE IN EFFORTS TO END THE CONFLICT HERE, CHARGING THAT DAMASCUS GOVERNMENT IS INTERFERING IN LEBANESE AFFAIRS.

ELIAS SARKIS HAS BEEN GOVERNOR OF LEBANON'S CENTRAL BANK FOR NEARLY A DECADE. A POST HE TOOK OVER AT THE HEIGHT OF A FINANCIAL CRISIS; AND HE WAS GIVEN MUCH OF THE CREDIT FOR RESTORING CONFIDENCE IN THE LEBANESE BANKING SYSTEM. MISTER SARKIS IS KNOWN AS A CHIHABIST, THE NAME GIVEN TO FOLLOWERS OF THE LATE PRESIDENT CHIHAB. FROM NINETEEN

SIXTY-TWO TILL NINETEEN SIXTY-SEVEN, HE WAS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENTIAL BUREAU. AND HE WAS LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM PROGRAMS ADOPTED BY THE CHIHAB GOVERNMENT.

MISTER SARKIS SUPPORTS THE CAIRO AGREEMENT ON THE LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS AND HE HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN A FIRM BACKER OF THE SYRIAN INITIATIVE HERE WHICH HAS LED TO CHARGES REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT HE IS SYRIA'S CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY, BOTH MISTER SARKIS AND MISTER EDDE ADVOCATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REFORMS FOR LEBANON. (OPT) MISTER EDDE REPORTEDLY WANTS TO END THE SECTARIAN NATURE OF LEBANON'S POWER STRUCTURE WHERE GOVERNMENTAL POSTS ARE SHARED ALONG RELIGIOUS LINES. THE ABOLITION OF THIS SYSTEM IS THE MAIN DEMAND OF LEBANON'S POWERFUL LEFT-WING ALLIANCE. AND ACCORDINGLY, LEFTIST LEADER KAMEL JUMBLATT HAS GIVEN HIS SUPPORT TO MISTER EDDE.

WHILE MISTER SARKIS HAS SAID HE FAVORS SOME OF THE LEFTIST REFORM PROPOSALS, HE DOES NOT SEE HOW ALL THE MEASURES CAN BE PUT INTO EFFECT IMMEDIATELY. PRESIDENT FRANJIYEH AND MOST RIGHT-WING CHRISTIAN LEADERS FAVOR MISTER SARKIS. BUT EACH CANDIDATE CAN BE EXPECTED TO DRAW SUPPORT FROM BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS, LEFTISTS AND RIGHTISTS. (END OPT)

THE OUTCOME OF SATURDAY'S ELECTION, IF IT IS HELD, IS, BY NO MEANS, CERTAIN. BUT WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT WHOEVER IS ELECTED LEBANON'S NEXT PRESIDENT WILL FACE THE ENORMOUS TASK OF RE-UNITING AND REBUILDING THIS WAR-TORN NATION.

JS/PY